

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

"The Happy Revolution"

Dispatch from the U.S. Commercial Agent in Mexico, James Smith Wilcocks, October 25, 1821

Sir:
The love of my country, the spring of every noble and generous action, induces me to communicate to you, for the information of the President, and for the benefit that may result to the Government and citizens of the United States, the following circumstantial and exact account of the happy revolution that has lately occurred in this kingdom of New Spain, which, by the blessing of God, the intrepidity, talents, and exertions of its patriotic chief, General Don Augustin Iturbide, the enlightened policy of its mother country, and the liberal and philanthropic ideas of its late captain General, Don Juan O'Donoju, has ended in its complete and entire emancipation.

That you may have a clear and distinct view of the subject, be fully impressed with the justice of the cause of this hitherto afflicted and oppressed people, and have also a general idea of the face of the country, its inhabitants, production, &c., it may not be improper to state that, since its conquest, (which if my memory serves me, was in the year 1521,) it has been governed by sixty-two viceroys, and innumerable commandant generals, governors, and superintendents of provinces, who, according to general tradition, have been, with very few exceptions, as many merciless and mercenary tyrants, the rapacity and unfeeling barbarity of whom nothing could have withstood for such a length of time but a land enriched by the beautiful hand of nature to a most extraordinary degree, and a people born and brought up, until of late, in all the intolerance of superstition and ignorance, and accustomed from their earliest infancy to the innumerable, and I may say almost incredible impositions of both church and state.

Few foreigners have, perhaps, had an opportunity of seeing as much of the kingdom as myself, having travelled on horseback from the port of Guaymas, on the Gulf of California, to almost every part of Sonora, and afterwards through the provinces and superintendencies of New Biscay, New Galicia, San Luis Potosi, Queretaro, and Mexico, to this city, a distance at least of seven hundred leagues, passing through all the principal cities, visiting the most celebrated mines, and conversing familiarly with all classes of people. . . .

Before the insurrection of the year 1810, the kingdom contained six millions of inhabitants; and it is worthy of remark,

that Providence has been no less lavish in the distribution of her gifts as respects mankind, than in the fertility and production of the earth; the natives of this country, not excepting even the Indians, being endowed with a quickness of perception and ability to acquire and make themselves masters of the arts and sciences that is very notable and far exceeds that of the inhabitants of Old Spain, and perhaps many other countries. At the above-mentioned period, the kingdom may be said to have been at its acme of prosperity; the royal revenue exceeding \$20,000,000, and the money coined at the mint of this city upwards of \$28,000,000 annually; it has, however, ever since been on the decline, in consequence of the devastations committed by both parties in the long and cruel war carried on between the Europeans and Americans, so that the population cannot now be computed at more than four millions, the revenue at more than half of what it was. . .

I have been informed that a very correct history of this insurrection . . . has been written . . . and published; it is useless, therefore, to say more on the subject than that its commencement was undoubtedly caused by the abuses daily committed in all branches of the Government in this kingdom, by the disorder in which Spain was thrown in consequence of the invasion of the French, and by the imprudent measures adopted in this city. . . .

Among those that contributed most to quell the insurrection was the before-mentioned General Don Augustin Iturbide, then colonel of the regiment of Celaya, and native of the city of Valladolid, in the province of Mechoacan. Born of European parents, and animated by mistaken zeal, he was induced to embrace the royal cause, and, with a fervor and impetuosity peculiar to his character, committed many arbitrary and violent acts, that in a great degree tarnished what would otherwise have been deemed brilliant achievements, and over which it is necessary to draw a veil, his subsequent conduct having entirely effaced them from the memory even of those most aggrieved. Indeed, it would appear that a sense of the injustice he had committed, and innate conviction of the impropriety of adhering to the party he had espoused, and a remorse of conscience, were the principal causes of the change in his political sentiments; for we see him all at once assuming a different character, and at a moment when his sovereign had heaped upon him innumerable honors.

The impossibility of re-establishing peace and quietness in the kingdom by the force of arms was fully ascertained, . . . the country being in a complete state of revolt, and full of chieftains that commanded from three to six hundred, and even a thousand men each, and bands of robbers that infested the highways in September, 1816. . . .

The crisis was too important and obvious to escape the penetration of our hero, Iturbide, who was also instigated to an immediate execution of the plan he had, in consequence, formed, of liberating his country forever from its thralldom, by the mutiny of several of the officers . . . and by the departure of a convoy for Acapulco with near a million of dollars, that was intended to be embarked in a ship bound to Manila, that he resolved on detaining. He immediately, therefore, concerted his measures with the clergy and friars, and, with the specious pretext of upholding them in their privileges and immunities, secured their favor and protection. He also communicated his design to such of the governors of the provinces as he thought likely to aid him in the execution of it, and, on his arrival in Iguala, persuaded a great part of the troops under his command to join him in the undertaking. . . . [T]hus prepared, he openly declared the independence of the kingdom, swearing it in the most solemn manner at the head of his army, in the said town of Iguala on the 24th day of February last, seizing, at the same time, and appropriating to the use of the nation, the treasure destined for the Manila ship. . . .

The cry of independence was no sooner raised in Iguala than it spread in all parts, and an army was formed in the provinces of Puebla and Vera Cruz, by the Colonels Herrera, Bravo, and Santa Ana, that took possession of the cities of Orizaba, Cordova) and Xalapa. . . .

At Guanajuato, where is one of the richest minerals in the kingdom, a mint was established, that proved afterwards very serviceable to the Independents, and injurious to the royal party; the silver from all the neighboring mines taking the direction of that city instead of Mexico.

While these scenes of glory were achieving in the provinces of Puebla and Vera Cruz, the siege of the city of Queretaro, one of the most beautiful in the kingdom, and the third in rank as respects size, opulence, and commerce, was pushed with much vigor by Iturbide in person. . . . This happy occurrence for the Independents was a deathblow to the Government. . . .

The city of Puebla de Los Angeles, the largest in the kingdom except Mexico, next attracted the attention of General Iturbide Puebla was all-important to the Government in the critical situation in which it found itself, being one of the chain of fortified

towns that connect Mexico with Vera Cruz, to which port it had resolved to retire with the European part of the army and inhabitants, in the event of not being able to sustain itself in the capital. Puebla was, therefore, well garrisoned, served with an excellent park of artillery, and defended with many cannon of a large calibre. . . . Iturbide, however, surrounded the city with so many troops that resistance would have been nothing short of an act of madness; it therefore capitulated.

On the surrender of Puebla, the army of Iturbide, which had now augmented to the number of about eighteen thousand, and which was composed entirely of veteran troops that had been disciplined in the King's service, and had gone over to him clandestinely, or joined him on the fall of the various cities he had conquered, received orders to march in separate columns to different towns in the neighborhood of Mexico, with the intention of manifesting to the Government of that city the folly of any further resistance. . . .

To complete the independence of the kingdom, there followed almost immediately the surrender of Acapulco, the castle of Perote, and Vera Cruz; the two former of which capitulated soon after, and the latter has, without doubt, ere this followed their example, advice having been received yesterday by the Government that it was on the eve of surrendering. The province of Guatemala, which has always been a separate viceroyalty from that of Mexico, was also sensible of the general impulse, and, desirous of becoming an integral part of the Mexican empire, has likewise sworn independence, which, without doubt, will extend to its neighboring provinces, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Veragua, so that we may from this instant consider North America, with the exception of Canada, as divided into two grand and important commonwealths, that may, with the aid of those that are forming in South America be able, in the course of time, to give the law to the opposite continent.

. . . I shall, now that I have finished my narrative, take the liberty to add a few remarks, and to say, in the first place, that the revolution which I have attempted to describe is not one of those that have been accomplished by means of unbridled passions, cruelty, rancor, or revenge, but, on the contrary has, from its commencement, been accompanied with brotherly love, patriotism, disinterestedness, truth, and good faith; so that the more I reflect on its origin and progress, the more is my admiration excited, and the more am I tempted to exclaim that America has produced two of the greatest heroes that ever existed—Washington and Iturbide. Secondly, that the new Government is established on a sure and solid foundation, the people being highly delighted with it, . . . the empire is . . . governed by regency of five of its most distinguished and enlightened statesmen, who have elected General

Iturbide President, and appointed him commander-in-chief of the land and sea forces, and by convention of thirty-six of the principal personages in the empire, as respects talents, rank, and riches. The independence is to be sworn in this city on the 27th instant, and the *Cortes* are to meet on the 24th of February next, the anniversary of the declaration in Iguala. In the mean time, the convention will be employed in enacting the most salutary decrees; and among those already passed is one declaring the commerce of this empire free to all nations; another, doing away [with] all the arbitrary taxes, impositions, and excises imposed by the former Government; a third, reducing the duties from sixteen to six per cent.; a fourth, for the encouragement of the miners, relinquishing to them the quota of silver formerly paid to the King, with other imposts that amounted to seventeen per cent.; so that many poor minerals that could not be worked before, can now be used to advantage; and a fifth, recognizing and making the new Government responsible for

the debt contracted by the old one, of thirty-six millions of dollars.

That there is a strong bias in the minds of the people of this country in favor of the Government and citizens of the United States in preference to all other nations, is beyond a doubt. . . . On this subject I have had various conferences with the leading members of the administration, whose sentiments will be fully explained to you shortly by Don Juan Manuel de Elizalda, the minister plenipotentiary that is already named, and now preparing to go to Washington, where I have no doubt he will be received and acknowledged as the representative of a free and independent nation; the Mexican empire being so at this time to all intents and purposes. . . .

Your most obedient, humble servant,

JAMES SMITH WILCOCKS

Source

"Emperor Dead" and ther Historic American Dispatches, Edited by
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